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# **The First Book of Peter**

*A practical Bible Commentary by Terry Baxter*



Peter was a simple fisherman. He was inquisitive, zealous, committed, loyal, sincere, stubborn, persistent, prone to rash decisions that were sometimes violent (ask a guy named Malchus about that), and often did not think before acting or speaking. But he was also the guy who stepped out of the boat and walked on water when the other eleven disciples were still sitting in the boat with their mouths hanging open. Yes, he denied Jesus three times, but he emerged from that experience forgiven, restored, and a leader of the church of unquestionable dedication with a love for Jesus that never faded and a Holy Spirit fire that led thousands to find Jesus as Messiah, Savior, and King. Peter's first book is a feast written to persecuted believers scattered from Israel all the way up to the Black Sea.



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Edited by Dan Jones

# **The First Book of Peter: A Practical Commentary by Terry Baxter**

*(Edited and occasional added comment by Dan Jones)*

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## **Book of 1 Peter: Introduction**

“1) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen”

This book opens with the bold claim of being written by, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” There is no doubt of the authorship or authenticity of this book.

According to Matthew 4:18-19, “Simon who was called Peter and Andrew his brother” were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. They were rugged, hard-working, and had a normal Jewish home education. They were by no means scholars, but were well equipped to manage their fishing business.

Their occupation in the fishing industry placed them in the middle class for their region. They were not merchants, but made enough to be home owners and provide for their families. Leaving the fishing business to follow Jesus was a major sacrifice and step of faith.

According to Matthew 8:14-15, Peter was also caring for his mother in-law, as was customary in that society in the absence of a social security system or retirement program. She was most likely a widow.

It can be argued that Peter was the most visible disciple in the four Gospels. He was inquisitive, zealous, committed, loyal, and sincere. But he was by all means a common and ordinary man.

He serves as an example of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31. In fact, Paul may have had Peter in mind when he wrote the words, “ (26) For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 30) so that no man may boast before God.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

This does not put Peter or the early disciples down. It simply demonstrates the magnificent change God can make in the life of any man or woman. It also underlines the fact that God can do extraordinary things through ordinary people like you and me. Never underestimate the plans God has for your life.

## **Appetizers Before the Feast: 1 Peter 1:1-2**

“1) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”

Peter was writing to a persecuted and scattered church. Things were getting worse, but already the believers were scattered to the north of Palestine all the way up to the Black Sea. They were going through difficult times.

Peter reminds them that they “are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the father.” Foreknowledge is an attribute of God. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows those who are His.

Jesus addressed this in John 10:25-30. He calls His own by name and they follow Him. His sheep hear His voice. He gives eternal life to them and they shall never perish. The doctrine of election is one of the great mysteries of God. (See also Ephesians 1:4-6)

Jesus made it clear that those who know Him start to experience the “sanctifying work of the Spirit.” The word “sanctify” is based on the root word for “holiness.” Over time, God changes His own to make them holy. Don’t confuse holiness with perfection. Sanctification is an active and ongoing process of making a person clean from the inside out. They are sprinkled with the blood of Christ and made clean.

This is the primary work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. I strongly encourage you to compare this with Ephesians 5:25-27, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and Titus 3:4-7. The Holy Spirit does not leave people the same. He changes them.

From the time of creation this has been the work of the Holy Spirit. I love what it says in Genesis 1:1-2. After God created the heavens and the earth, everything was formless and void... until the Holy Spirit started moving. He added order, design, and beauty.

He does the same thing in the life of every true Christian. It doesn’t matter what kind of chaos is in your life when you come to Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation, the old things pass away and new things come. The Spirit of God takes the Word of God and uses it to produce growth and fruit in the people of God.

Peter makes it clear that God’s people obey the inner voice of the Holy Spirit and the written Word of God. His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him. You cannot force anyone to obey God. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Paul made it clear in Romans 8:5-17 that the indwelling Holy Spirit imparts new life in true Christians. With salvation, the sail is filled and the rudder is set in a godward direction.

Peter completes his introduction by pronouncing a blessing of grace and peace on the believers. Christians have resources not available to the world. We have God’s grace available to us. I look at grace as divine strength and enablement for daily living. The result is the peace of God that helps us navigate all the storms of this life.

In two short verses Peter serves a few appetizers before the full feast. He gives a preview of things to come in his short letter. Pull up to the banquet table and roll up your sleeves. 1 Peter is a feast.

### **Born Again to a Living Hope: 1 Peter 1:3**

“3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

This short verse is amazing. Peter is praising God the Father for His great mercy. Peter fully understood the judgment our sin deserves and the holiness of God who is absolute light and allows no darkness in His presence. (1 John 1:5-6) It is unfathomable that sinful people can approach Him, let alone have personal relationship with Him. But He found a way!

Without getting hung up on the statement that “He caused us to be born again,” note the focus is on “a living hope.” The wages of sin is death, but the end result of the work of Christ is life. The bottom line is that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. God put it all on the line to redeem sinful people. (1 John 4:9-10, 19)

He took the initiative. The Father planned it and caused it to happen. The whole concept of being “born again” was the Father’s idea. Don’t minimize God the Father. His love was behind this whole marvelous plan.

You cannot read this passage without thinking of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1-21. It was there that Jesus told the teacher of Israel that he had to be born again. If you wonder what it means to be “born again,” go back and review the full conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus.

Notice that this is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The bottom line is that we did nothing to earn or merit our salvation. God did it all right down to choosing and drawing us to the gospel.

I don’t try to figure it out, but the longer I’m a Christian and enjoy intimate fellowship with God the more I ponder the question, “Why me?” My only recourse is to do what Peter says in this verse; “I bless and praise God.” I am eternally grateful for forgiveness, salvation, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and the invitation to come boldly to the throne of grace. I look forward to eternity with an eager anticipation.

But how secure is this salvation? Stay tuned. Peter turns to that question in the next few verses.

## **The Full Scope of Salvation: 1 Peter 1:4-5**

“4) to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5) who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

I do not like the phrase “eternal security” because it is not found in the Bible, but the old hymn “Blessed Assurance” resonates with me. Peter pulls all stops in these two verses as he explains the coming inheritance in Christ for the born again believer. Let’s look at some key words in these two verses.

Peter uses the word “inheritance” as his main subject. This Greek word means “an heir, to inherit” and has the idea of that which is promised being much more glorious than that which is currently bestowed.” It is a legal term associated with the children of Israel eventually inheriting the promised land as compared to slavery in Egypt or wandering in the wilderness. Peter then uses several terms to describe our inheritance in Christ.

First, notice that our inheritance in Christ is “imperishable.” This word means “incorruptible” and has in it the idea of that which is immortal as compared to the current body of man which is mortal and therefore ages, diminishes, dies, and eventually decays.

Second, Peter uses the word “undefiled.” This has in it the idea of not being subject to being defiled, polluted, or fading in any way. It is incorruptible meaning it cannot turn bad, spoil, become infected, mold, decay, or rot.

Third, notice that our inheritance “will not fade away.” This centers on the thought of an earthy flower in full bloom until it begins to fade away and wither. Our inheritance is not subject to withering, drying up, and dying. In heaven, the seasons of fall and winter never come when everything turns brown, fades, and withers away.

Fourth, Peter uses the phrase of being “reserved in heaven for you”. This relates to the idea of keeping, watching over, delivering the promise, or executing the terms of the promise or contract. It relates to our coming heavenly reality or dwelling. It is a certainty and not wishful thinking.

Fifth, Peter stresses the point that those who are destined for this inheritance have the promise protected by the power of God. It is not conditional on our performance, it is based on the power and character of God. He is the guarantee of the bestowment of the promise.

Finally, note that salvation is entered into by faith and will be fully revealed in the last times. This has in it the idea of revealing, uncovering, unveiling, and disclosure. Our current benefits of salvation are a mere taste or preview of the full glory that will be revealed when Christ returns.



Peter is trying to compare our current experience in this earthly realm and environment to what is to come in the future in the heavenly realm. Paul does a similar comparison in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 and uses many of the same words in describing what is to come.

Both Peter and Paul conclude that our coming heavenly inheritance will be incomprehensibly more glorious than anything we experience in our present earthly bodies, experience, dwelling, and environment. It is the difference between perishable and imperishable, dishonor and glorious, weakness and power, mortal and immortal, a natural body and a spiritual body, earthly and heavenly, temporal and eternal.

When all of this is rolled together it begins to capture the glorious inheritance that awaits the born again believer in our heavenly dwelling. Peter packaged all of this together as the full scope of our salvation.

### **The Refiner's Fire: 1 Peter 1:6-7**

“6) In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7) that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”

In verses 4-5, Peter gave us a glimpse of what is to come. It is marvelous and glorious, but he quickly returns to the struggles of this life. He points out that we rejoice at what is to come, but we must focus on here and now.

He points out that this present life will be accompanied by trials and distress. Life here is not easy. It is not easy for the Christian and it is not easy for the non-Christian because we all live in a fallen world and have mortal bodies that are subject to aches, pains, sickness, relational conflicts, blisters, and aging.

Yet this world is good enough that people are tempted to barter away what is to come to get all the gusto, pleasure, and benefits they can stuff into this life. The lusts of the flesh (passion sins), the lusts of the eyes (possession sins) and the boastful pride of life (position sins) entices people to forsake God and instead seek the embrace of the world. (1 John 2:15-17)

Peter comes back in verse 7 to say that our faith will be tested. It can be tested by trials or it can be tested through temptations. The bottom line is that our faith is more precious than gold which is perishable. In other words, our faith is the monetary system of the spiritual realm. It is the basis of our connection to God.

Though God does not tempt us to do evil, He will test our faith. (James 1:13-18; Hebrews 11:17) The Bible says that Abraham was tested when God bid him to offer up Isaac. (Genesis 22:1)

The good news is that the test is also part of the school of faith. It is intended to build up and not tear down. It is intended to strengthen our faith and not weaken it.

Peter compares the trials of this life to a refiner's fire that refines and purifies gold. The purer the gold the greater the value. The struggles of this life are like the refiners oven. The bottom line is that we are God's gold. We are jewels of the kingdom. His goal is to make us beautiful and glorious so that we shine with His praise at His coming.

I believe our faith can grow because we are proactive or by default. We can pursue God diligently and seek Him through prayer, Bible study, obedience, walking in the Spirit, and service; or we can be reluctant and carnal prodigals that He disciplines and corrects every step of the way. (Read 1 Corinthians 2 and 3)

Sadly, I have been in both camps. I have been to the woodshed for the rod of discipline and I've walked in God's favor and blessings. Either way His goal is refining the gold of our lives. He wants to make us beautiful for His glory.

### **Overflow of Loving Jesus: 1 Peter 1:8-9**

"8) and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9) obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

Some people are like doubting Thomas. He would not believe Jesus had risen from the dead until he could see with his own eyes. "Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."" John 20:29

The same is true for a loving relationship with Jesus. Some hold Him at arm's distance because they do not see Him. They are stuck in the mindset that if it cannot be seen, it doesn't exist.

The problem is that love itself cannot be seen. Faith cannot be seen. Joy cannot be seen. For that matter, many of the laws of physics cannot be seen. Gravity cannot be seen. Even light itself cannot be seen in its normal spectrum. But all of these things exist and we can even measure the effects of them.

I would argue that the effects of a close and loving relationship with God can also be measured. It shows up as the fruit of the Spirit, changed character, and amazing favor and blessings. Sometimes it shows up as divine protection, provision, and promotion.

Over time, the benefits of walking with God literally show up in every other aspect of life. I would go so far as to say that no other experience in this world compares to a life built on God. Why? Because the spillover of God's blessing affects all else. I can say with the Apostle Paul that my love relationship with Jesus is by far the core value of my life. (See Philippians 4:7-11)

Even otherwise painful trials are tempered by God's presence, grace, and illumination. God wastes no opportunity to build and deepen our lives.

I vividly remember when we lost our son, my wife said, "I don't know how those without Jesus can make it through traumatic experiences in life!" Let me be honest, it was a very difficult trial, but the presence of God far surpassed our ordeal. His love, grace, and presence were almost tangible through the whole storm.

I share that story to punctuate that knowing and loving Jesus has an overflow in this life that goes beyond description. It makes the good times better, the difficult times sweeter, and bad times more meaningful.

That was Peter's point in verse 9. The outcome of faith is aimed at more than eternal salvation, it is aimed at the transformation of the human soul during our sojourn in this life. That is the thrust of this verse.

### **The Prophets Were Baffled: 1 Peter 1:10-12**

"10) As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11) seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. 12) It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look."

The mystery of what we have in Christ is so amazing that the Old Testament prophets scratched their heads trying to comprehend what they were writing. I can imagine Isaiah trying to understand the birth of the Messiah in Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7, or the impact of the crucifixion as he prophesied Isaiah 53. He was utterly perplexed and fascinated at the same time.

Even more astounding was Joel 2:28-32. He could not imagine the Holy Spirit coming upon all people. Peter quoted from this text extensively on the day of Pentecost. (See Acts 2:14-21) In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would come upon a leader or priest occasionally and then often be taken away. It was unfathomable that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon all mankind including the Gentiles.

These are just a few examples of how they tried to piece together the puzzle. They were seeking to know who the Messiah was and the timing of the marvelous new age to come. The only conclusion revealed to them was that it was related to a future time.

Peter goes so far as to say that even the angels in heaven marveled at these things. I can imagine the angel Gabriel when he spoke to Daniel about coming events. (Daniel 9:20-12:13)

No wonder angels showed up as a huge heavenly choir at the birth of Jesus Christ. (See Luke 2:9-14)\*

The angels were as amazed at the unfolding of the Gospel as the Old Testament prophets were. Human redemption and salvation by grace through faith perplexed them. The fact that fallen people could become children of God by new birth and be transferred into the kingdom of God was beyond comprehension.

What we have in Christ is so precious. The Old Testament prophets and even the angels in heaven were stretched beyond description trying to wrap their minds around what was about to come. Peter goes on to stress the point that we should not take it for granted.

But let me be so bold as to take another huge step forward. When we read about the second coming of Christ and “The Day of the Lord”, it is equally perplexing. Peter briefly tried to describe it in 2 Peter 3:5-13 and Paul talked about a heavenly vision in 2 Corinthians 12 that left him speechless. For that matter, the whole book of Revelation has baffled the theologians for centuries. Yes, we are left as dumbfounded as the Old Testaments prophets.

But let me stress this point, just like the first coming of Christ happened right on time and all the mysteries were fulfilled, so also will be the second coming of Christ. In one sense, we are in the same sandals as Isaiah, Daniel, and Joel. Glorious mysteries beyond imagination await us in the near future. Amazing things are coming.

*(\*As we all know, the birth announcement of Jesus took place in front of some lowly shepherds, but this was not a lowly event. The Greek word Luke uses for the gathering of angels present on that night is “stratias” and it means a large army. It’s not a theological stretch at all to call what happened that night an invasion of the Kingdom of Light into the Kingdom of Darkness. When the night sky was filled with the armies of the LORD singing His glory, they proclaimed that the peace with God humanity had lost in the Garden was about to be restored after all these years of waiting by the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah! –dj)*

### **The Battle for the Mind: 1 Peter 1:13**

“Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:13

This is the application verse for everything Peter has been saying up to this point. The trials of this life can wear us down so we need to win the battle for the mind. We need to be proactive in preparing our mind for action. You need to take control of your thought life, your self-talk and the flaming darts the enemy shoots your way.

This translates into being sober-minded. We are not to be governed by emotions. They are not stable. Emotions fluctuate and change according to our circumstances. I believe we are to

discipline our mind to be positive and not negative, to be governed by truth and not deception and to be in tune with God and not the world. This requires being grounded in the Word of God. The Bible needs to become the foundation for our convictions, life philosophy and principles for living.

Let me be transparent about some bumps in the road in my journey over the years. Early in my Christian life I struggled with walking in the Spirit. More often than not I was walking according to my emotions and feelings. There were numerous times that this became an excuse for sin and I would justify my actions because my emotions were so strong. I struggled with my temper and had strong temptations. Over time the Holy Spirit faithfully started renewing my mind and helping me put off the old self and step into the new self. (Ephesians 4:20-24) Every Christian needs to work through this sanctification process. There are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity.

Another problem I had was discerning God's leading in my life. I put too much emphasis on external circumstances and not enough emphasis on prayer and listening to the Spirit of God through the Word of God. The result was that I wasted time getting distracted and going off on tangents. Our fleshly wants can disguise themselves as angels of light and point us down dead-end roads.

Peter concludes this verse by saying we need to set our inner compass on God's amazing grace. We are not in this battle alone. God does the fighting for us. If I were to summarize the previous several verses and the contrast between Old Testament living and New Testament living, it would come down to grace and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Every born-again Christian has divine resources for victory at their disposal every day.

But notice that Peter includes the thought of looking forward to the grace that will come at the revelation of Jesus Christ. We need to live with an eternal perspective. Something better is coming. Jesus talked about storing up treasures in heaven. I believe we need to make as many deposits as possible during this life in our heavenly bank account. There are numerous times that I have turned away from pleasures of this world knowing that something much better is coming. Heaven is a powerful motivator.

God has brought me back to 1 Peter 1:13 many times over the years. The Battle for the Mind is there in every stage of life. Take control of your mind or it will stray down some very fruitless and shameful paths.

### **The Meaning of Holiness: 1 Peter 1:14-16**

"14) As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15) but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16) because it is written, 'You shall be holy, as I am Holy.'"

These three verses begin with a declaration of family. We are part of the family of God. We are His children. Verse 17 starts with the phrase, “if you address as Father.” There is a profound backdrop of acceptance and kinship in these verses. Salvation puts us in a relationship with God in which we can cry out “Abba Father.” ( See Galatians 4:5-7; Romans 8:15-17)

With this adoption into the family of God comes new identity and a new standard of conduct. We begin to reflect the values and character of our new Father. We walk in newness of life. We are set free from the power, influence, and devious works of the evil one. We are no longer compelled to be conformed to his sinful designs.

Salvation is accompanied by a call to holiness. It is the idea of being “set apart” for God. It means “to be separated” or “sanctified.” The word “consecrated” is also involved in being holy. Jesus didn’t die to make us perfect, He died to make us holy and set us aside for God.

His work on the cross atoned for our sin and made us clean. But notice, we are called to obedience. Verse 14 starts with the phrase “as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts...” The emphasis is that when we become Christians we part ways with the overtly sinful practices of the world. Capture that thought because we are about to make a discovery about holiness that might surprise you.

The motivation for holiness is to be “set aside” for God. He wants us to be holy because He is holy. This call to holiness is seen three times in the Old Testament. It appears in Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:1-4 and 20:6-7. The three contexts are interesting. They relate to 1) not eating unclean insects and animals that are strangled, 2) not participating in the sinful activities that go with idolatry including the sexual immorality and human sacrifice from Leviticus 18; and 3) not turning to mediums and spiritists.

The amazing thing about this list is that it represents the three things the Jerusalem council told the Gentile Christians to abstain from in following God. Read Acts 15:19-29. Let me emphasize that holiness is not perfection, it is merely setting ourselves aside for God by not participating in pagan immorality, ceremonies, values or worship. We dedicate our loyalty to God and His ways. Holiness means that Christians are set apart from worldly practices. We are marked by loyalty to Jesus Christ and His ways.

Holiness as it applies to people does not mean we no longer have temptations or struggle with personal sin. Holiness means we are set apart for God in the big stuff. We no longer participate in worldly and pagan indulgence. By contrast, sanctification is the beginning of a journey in which the Holy Spirit starts an inner purifying process. He purifies and cleanses us from the inside out. Holiness and sanctification have the same Greek root word but have different meanings. Holiness related to people is to be “set apart for God.” Sanctification is “to be made clean” from the inside out.”

## **Living with Reverence for God. 1 Peter 1:17-21**

“17) And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18) knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19) but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20) For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21) who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

I am going to develop this text backwards. Let’s look at the last part first.

The main point of what Peter is saying in these verses is that our Heavenly Father is not cheap. He did not purchase our salvation with created and perishable things like silver or gold. Gold may have value because it is pure and the streets of heaven are paved with it. (Revelation 21:21) This might be hard to believe, but because He is the Creator, He could create more gold at will than the federal government can print new money in Washington. That kind of purchase price would devalue both us and our salvation.

But our Father redeemed us with something infinitely more valuable than gold or silver. Our salvation was purchased with the priceless sacrifice of God’s very own Son. As of an unblemished and spotless lamb, His blood was shed for our salvation. God paid the ultimate price for our salvation. Our salvation is free to us, but it was not cheap for God. This translates into a call for fear and reverence of God because of the high value He places on us and our salvation.

Now let’s return to the first part of this text. Think about it: If human sin was so serious that the Father was willing to sacrifice His very own Son to pay the just penalty for human redemption, what makes you think He will not be equally as just and impartial in the way He measures our works?

It is at this point that you need to understand that though Christ purchased our eternal salvation, the way we live our Christian life will be judged by God. According to texts like 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, the way we build on the foundation of Christ in this life will be judged for rewards and assignments in the life to come. Sadly, some will literally shrink away from Christ in shame at His coming. (See 1 John 2:28) Others will hear those words, “well done good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21)

Peter is making the point that the Father will be absolutely impartial in the way He measures and judges our lives. This translates into another call for fear and reverence of God. Just because God is our Father, doesn’t mean He won’t be the perfect umpire in calling our life.

Many today live as if grace is a license for sin. They view God as so loving they are deceived into thinking there is no consequence for sin. However the Bible makes it clear that living by grace is not an excuse for sinful living or compromise with the world. Jude warned about those who turn the doctrine of grace into an excuse for sin. (See Jude 1:4) When properly understood, grace and the filling of the Holy Spirit removes all excuses for sinful living. God is to be loved and revered at the same time. There will be consequences for the way we live our lives.

### **Redeeming a Lost World: 1 Peter 1:17-18**

“17) If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18) knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,”

I want to revisit these verses because Peter uses a few phrases that are often missed or overlooked. The first is from verse 17 when he used the phrase “the time of your stay upon earth.” This underlines the mortality of man. We are merely passing through and have no guarantee of how long we have in this life. It behooves each of us to make the most of the time we have here on earth. Hopefully we leave a positive mark.

But second, notice in verse 18 Peter talks about “the futile way of life inherited from your forefathers.” Our parents can only impart natural or physical life. A person needs to be born-again in order to have a spiritual life. Paul spent considerable time in 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:3 developing a contrast between the natural man and the spiritual man. He concludes that the two are very different. They have different worldviews. They think differently, reason differently, and see the world through radically different lenses. They act and behave differently and have different morals and values.

I personally believe this is part of the tension in modern society. Evolutionists who are naturalists see the world very differently than Creationists, many of whom are Christians or religious. The first view sees man as the center of the universe and the second view sees God as the center of the universe. The first view is predisposed toward liberalism and the second view is predisposed toward conservatism. This divide cannot be bridged through mere debate or a forced political process.

Christians need to be salt and light in the world as they build relational bridges to the lost in the process of evangelism. Only the Holy Spirit and the Gospel can change a heart and transform the futile thinking of the lost. God intends for agape love to be our medium of communication. This kind of love is intended to become a bridge of servanthood to the lost world.



That's why the New Testament focuses on discipleship and transformed lives. When Christians fall short of this call and force their morals on the world, walls go up and tensions flare. I have seen good Christians become very mean people in the way they deal with the lost.

Instead of a healed society, this results in a divided society. It is impossible to bully and force the unredeemed world into conservatism. Our biblical mission is conversion of the lost and not forcing conservatism on society. Social change is the natural outgrowth of revival and awakening.

### **The Pre-existence of Christ: 1 Peter 1:20-21**

“20) For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21) who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

These verses support what is called the pre-existence of Christ. He did not come into existence at His birth through Mary, He existed before the foundation of the world. John 1:1-4 tells us that all things were created by Him. He was the Word that was with the Father for all eternity past.

The word “incarnation” means to become flesh. Jesus was born into the world with a task in mind. He came for the sake of human redemption. He took on human form so He could become a sacrifice for our sins.

This is what makes human redemption so costly and precious. As I mentioned in an earlier post, Jesus was not a created commodity like silver or gold. Supply determines value. God can create unlimited amounts of silver and gold. Jesus was not created, He was the Creator. He was God's only begotten Son. He was the perfect sacrifice for human atonement.

The resurrection proved His deity. I like the way Romans 1:4 says it, “who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” He not only became the purchase price of our redemption, He also became the basis of our salvation.

Because of Him we are believers in God. He actively worked bringing us into relationship with God. He is the basis of our faith and hope in God. If salvation were based on our efforts, we would forever remain lost because as humans we constantly fall short. We miss the mark. We sin. But Jesus was the spotless, unblemished, and sinless sacrifice.

He did once for all humanity what the Jewish sacrificial system of offering lambs year after year could not accomplish. (See Hebrews 9:11-22). His work on the cross accomplished human redemption once and for all time. He was the final sacrifice for human sin. He is the only basis of human redemption.

## **Playing The Lead Role of Agape Love: 1 Peter 1:22-23**

“22) Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, 23) for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.”

Many of the New Testament writers penned amazing love texts. For Paul, it was 1 Corinthians 13. For John, it was 1 John 4:7-12. Without doubt this text was Peter's moment.

He calls on the believers to act in obedience to the truth and purify their souls for a sincere love of the brethren. The human soul is like a garden. It will sprout whatever seeds are planted. We are responsible for the planting and cultivation of our soul. Weeds must be removed frequently and irrigation is required. The very next verse builds on the illustration of a garden by pointing out the seed of God's Word planted in our soul with the Gospel.

When the heart is right, it is possible to be fervent in the way we love others. The Greek wording in this verse is interesting. It has the idea of being the main actor in “The Play of Love.” The believers role in this play is to act out the main character of Agape love even though we may be inexperienced. We are to be genuine and fervent in this role.

He then reminds the believers in verse 23 that this role fits them because they have been born again with the seed of God's word. This seed has the DNA to produce the genuine fruit of Agape love. God's word implanted and well-tended can produce an abundant crop of agape love making it possible to fervently love one another.

When you get up in the morning dress to be the star actor all day long. Remember, you play the main character and lead role of agape love in the drama of life.

## **Longing For God's Word: 1 Peter 2:1-3**

“1) Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2) like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3) if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

Sometimes the chapter divisions come in abrupt places. The last few verses of Chapter One were talking about “how the Word of the Lord abides forever.” God's Word is not like grass or flowers that quickly fade away. Peter made it clear that it was God's Word that was preached to them. (1 Peter 1:23-25)

He opens chapter two by telling the believers to put aside all malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Instead, they were to be like newborn babies that long for the pure milk of the word of

God. Newborns have an appetite that needs to be satisfied about every four hours. They constantly crave milk, and it is amazing how quickly they grow on pure milk.

You can tell when a newborn baby is approaching feeding time. They get fussy, moody, and start crying. Their whole demeanor changes. The same thing happens to Christians when they aren't feeding enough on God's Word.

I want to crave and feed on God's word like a newborn baby craves for its mother's milk. I want that kind of hunger and appetite for God and His Word. I pray for this "newborn-like hunger" for myself and others. This kind of feeding on the Word of God will bring amazing growth. Let me share a bit of my story because it illustrates these verses.

The night I became a Christian back in high school, Psalms Chapter One became my life Scripture. I memorized it the very night I became a Christian. It is very similar to 1 Peter 2:1-3. The chapter opens with an admonition to set aside sinful living to seek God day and night through His Word. It says the person who meditates on Scripture this way will be like a tree planted by rivers of water and that he will produce constant fruit and will prosper in whatever he does.

Let me be honest, I was a mess when I came to Jesus. I could barely read, had terrible morals and values, was dabbling in the occult and was probably the dumbest kid in my class. My journey to freedom took several years, but God was so faithful to love me through the ups and downs and all of my struggles. I was and still am a work in progress.

I learned how to read by memorizing Scripture. Every night I would memorize Scripture for about half an hour before going to bed and then drift off to sleep meditating on what I was memorizing. As the verses I memorized turned into chapters and books of the Bible, the fruit of meditating compounded. The Holy Spirit is an amazing teacher.

Shortly, I was invited to join a Bible quiz team. That first year we memorized the book of 1 Corinthians. God's implanted Word started changing me. We won nationals in Bible Quizzing that year and my academics in school started changing radically. I ended up graduating as an honor student and started teaching Bible studies in nursing homes and speaking in churches all over north central Minnesota where I grew up. I was so in love with Jesus. I didn't get side-tracked with theological debates or denominational tensions. I just claimed everything for my life the Bible talked about.

After graduation, I was off to Bible College and then into a life of ministry in many capacities as a pastor, evangelist, special speaker, and writer. God has been so good to me and my family.

I love Jesus and His Word. I sincerely seek to walk in the Spirit and be salt and light in the world. I became a Christian in 1973 and I still long for the Word of God like a newborn baby

longs for milk. I have tasted the goodness and kindness of the Lord and can't get enough of Him. I give Him the glory for any good thing in my life. He is so awesome and amazing!

I still spend lots of time in Scripture. I read, memorize, and meditate on Scripture and I am constantly listening to the audible Bible or good Bible preachers and teachers. The Bible is more than milk, it is a very full meal. I enjoy My time in God's Word more now than any time in my life.

### **Living Stones: 1 Peter 2:4-5**

"4) And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

I like unique buildings. The bigger and more glorious the better. That's one of the reasons why I liked being in the Iowa legislature. We have one of the most spectacular State Capital buildings in the United States. It's also why I like traveling to what's often called the "old countries." They have incredible old stone buildings.

One day as Jesus was going out from the temple, one of the disciples said to him, "Teacher, behold what beautiful stones and what wonderful buildings." (Mark 13:1) I'm not sure which disciple it was, but the buildings and even the stones in the buildings caught his attention. Jesus wasn't impressed. He said, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." (Mark 13:2)

Don't misunderstand. Jesus was the carpenter's son. He was into architecture and buildings. He liked quality work. He just had His mind on a far more magnificent temple. He envisioned a living temple made up of living stones. That's what Peter was talking about in the verses above. Jesus was about to build something eternal and glorious. Jesus was thinking of you and me as Christians.

Have you ever looked at yourself as a living stone? Scientists are baffled today trying to figure out how ancient man quarried and transported the mega stones to some of the ancient building sites. Some weighed hundreds of tons. It's one of the wonders of the ancient world. Getting them to the building site was one thing, stacking them on top of each other was another challenge and then fitting them together was an even greater mystery. Many are so tightly fitted air cannot even blow between them. They are perfect. It is a lost art.

What Jesus is doing in your life and my life is far more intriguing. He is at work cutting, shaping, polishing, and fitting us into His living temple. He is bringing together millions of these living stones from all around the world. Even more intriguing is the fact that He has been building this temple for nearly 2,000 years. If you want to stretch your imagination, take some time and read Revelation 21:10-27. It talks about the new Jerusalem Jesus is building.

In one sense, life here is like a gigantic stone quarry. God is shaping and cutting living stones. As you go through trials or face difficult times, just remember that Jesus is working on you. The same is true when He blesses you or allows you to be fruitful. He is preparing you to fit into something much bigger than yourself. He is personally shaping and fitting you into His living temple.

### **God Is Building Something Very Special: 1 Peter 2:4-10**

“5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

In the last post I emphasized the fact that we are living stones, but it doesn't stop there. We are “being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood...” Peter is introducing the concept of the priesthood of the believer. Every born-again believer has instant and continual access to God. The wall of separation is gone.

We as common people do not need a mediator between us and God as in the Old Testament. Why? Because Jesus became our mediator and high priest. We now have instant access to God. (Hebrews 4:14-16) This is about far more than intercession. We are now called to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. The whole book of Hebrews unpacks the full scope of this mystery.

Keep in mind, in the Old Testament there was always a wall of separation between God and people. Even the priesthood stood at a distance as the book of Hebrews so clearly expounds. The high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year. All of that changed with the work of Christ on the cross.

Paul makes it clear in Romans 12:1-2 that we are now called to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. This whole concept baffled the Orthodox Jews and even the believers who came from a Jewish background. The concept that common and ordinary people were no longer profane but were valued by God was mind-boggling.

As the text unfolds in 1 Peter 2:9-10, Peter puts more pieces of the puzzle together. Let me quote: “9) But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10) for you once were no a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

In this full context Peter Gives a glimpse of the full New Testament mystery of what God is doing in this present age. Something beyond comprehension is taking place. God is working on a building program that will culminate in Revelation 21 and 22 with the New Jerusalem and you and I as believers are a crucial part of it.

I believe in our day God is putting the finishing touches on His glorious living building. The Old Testament temple and sacrificial system were a mere shadow of a much greater and more glorious building program that God is currently working on with living stones. I can only imagine.

### **Jesus Is The Cornerstone: 1 Peter 2:6-8**

“6) For this is contained in Scripture: “Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed.” 7) This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “the stone which the builders rejected, this became the very cornerstone,” 8) and, “a stone of stumbling and rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.”

Jesus is the cornerstone. In architecture, the cornerstone of a building holds all else together. Jesus Christ literally holds everything including the universe together. (See Colossians 1:17) He is the choice and precious corner stone that the Bible points to from Genesis to Revelation as the foundation for all things. Take whatever time is needed to wrap your mind around what Peter is saying in this text. It is absolutely profound.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone for the spiritual realm as well as the physical realm. He is the cornerstone of truth, history, philosophy, physics, math, science, astronomy, and sociology. He is the sum total of all things. He is the Creator and the Sustainer. He holds it all together. He is the lens that brings all else into focus. When He is ignored or left out the result is futility and often disastrous.

Peter says there is a precious value to those who put Jesus Christ in His rightful place in their life. Those who believe in Him will not be disappointed. Those who in simple faith build their house on Him will withstand the storms of life and find blessings beyond comprehension both in this life and into eternity. (See Matthew 7:24-29)

Paul went so far in Philippians 3:7-11 to say that the surpassing value he gained in knowing Christ made his previous life seem like rubbish and sewage. There are very real and tangible blessings on the life of the man or woman who makes Jesus Christ the cornerstone of their life. There are tangible blessings for making Jesus Christ the Lord of your marriage, family, friendships, business, career and investments.

By contrast, in verses 7-8 Peter says that Jesus Christ becomes a stone of stumbling and rock of offense to those who reject Him. That's the way it was for the Jewish religious leaders who rejected Jesus Christ as Messiah and put Him on the cross, and that's the way it is for every man or woman who rejects Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of their life. They may be sports figures, movie stars, politicians, scientists or business people. Both history and the daily news is full of stories of people who crash and burn. They stumble because they are disobedient to the Word of God.

I am now at the age of having perspective. I've seen many things come and go. I've seen trends start and die. I've seen people become popular, famous, and even successful. When the world makes hero's of people with no foundation and substance in life, it will be short-lived. They often tail spin, get caught up in addictions, give way to shameful crimes or die tragically and prematurely.

Scientific theories come and go and movements start and die. Corrupt political leaders might rise to power and rule over millions with an iron fist, but in the end they die and are displaced. They stumble because they are disobedient to the Word.

The bottom line is that your life will be measured by what you do with Jesus Christ and whether or not you choose to live for Him. As for me and my house, we will live for Jesus Christ and lift Him up as Savior and Lord.

### **Abstain From Fleshly Lusts: 1 Peter 2:11-12**

“11) Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. 12) Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

In the book of 2 Peter, the Apostle tells the story of Lot while he was living in Sodom and Gomorrah. 2 Peter 2:7-8 says; “7) and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8) (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds).”

The truth is that many believers are fighting wars of their own making. Instead of following the example of Abraham who put a good distance between himself and the revelry of Sodom and Gomorrah, many Christians are choosing the way of Lot. They are feeding on pornography, romance novels, soap operas by day, and immoral and violent movies by night. Then they wonder why God seems distant and why they have no zeal or godly fire in their soul?

The problem is obvious, they are putting themselves in a place for their soul to be oppressed and tormented. You cannot dance with Sodom and Gomorrah and be immune to temptation. Your soul will be twisted and tormented.

I believe things are much worse today than in the book of Genesis. The electronic media and the internet can become a constant bombardment of worldly temptations and values. You need to guard your own heart. You need to protect your love for Jesus and your walk in the Spirit. Don't let your flesh guide your sanctification process. Instead follow the advice of Peter and abstain from fleshly lusts as aliens and strangers. Don't be at home with worldly values.

Be the chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, and people for God's own possession talked about in the previous two verses. Make it your goal to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light. Run into God's arms of grace and mercy and set up camp in His presence.

### **Turning the Tide: 1 Peter 2:12**

"12) Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."

The early Christians were hated for no reason. The Orthodox Jews hated them and wanted to destroy them and the Romans hated them. The result was all kinds of false stories, rumors, and allegations. The fires to persecution were fueled by false reports about the character and conduct of the Christians.

The Christian leaders responded by admonishing the Christians to have excellent behavior in the world. They were to conduct themselves with love, honor, respect, dignity, and truth. They practiced what Jesus taught. They loved their enemies, did good to those who hurt them and ministered to all in need without bias or prejudice.

The result was that the gospel was consistently lived out in the public arena by the Christians. They not only preached the gospel, they lived the gospel. This silenced the critics and adorned their message. This is what eventually won the Roman Empire to Christianity.

I believe there is a lesson to be learned from the early church. We again are living in days that are very similar. The secular world has a very distorted bias against Christianity. It will take one Christian at a time reaching one non-Christian at a time with genuine Christian love.

I recently had a very refreshing conversation with a Christian brother about some of the demonstrators and agitators. He and a handful of others have made it their mission field. They are attending the rallies, listening, building bridges, consistently loving and sharing the gospel.

They are building friendships and seeing people come to Jesus.

Those who are reached with the gospel end up leaving the movements because the truth sets them free. The bottom line is that Jesus and the gospel is the only message that calms the pain and wins the inner war that is feeding the hate and destructive behavior.

I encourage you to compare our current social crisis to Roman culture and the challenge faced by the early church. My conclusion is that the solution is the same. Christians have the answer that needs to be applied by reaching one person at a time with the love of Christ and the gospel. It is the proven way to turn the tide.



## **God and Government: 1 Peter 2:13-14**

“13) Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14) or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.”

Peter understood the importance of the state and of government. The early Christians understood that their citizenship was in heaven and their mission field was on earth. (Philippians 3:20-21) They prayed for those in leadership and sought every opportunity to reach them with the gospel. (1 Timothy 2:1-7). Paul became a witness to many governors, magistrates, and even Caesar himself. He showed the utmost respect for them.

Government has a God-given role. It is ordained by God to protect law and order. It is the role of government to punish evil and praise good. Paul goes so far in Romans 13:1-7 to say that government is a minister of God for the purpose of keeping peace and order.

I want to go on record as saying “I’m proud to be an American.” I’m proud of our history and the fact that we are the land of the free. I’m proud that we took the lead to eradicate slavery, lead the way in establishing human rights, fought tyranny around the world without giving way to colonialism, protected freedom of speech, became the land of unparalleled access to education and opportunity, and that we support religious freedom. I celebrate the fact that “in God we trust” and support liberty and justice for all.

To those who are trying to tear us apart, promote anarchy, engage in violence and riots I say you have the right to peaceful free speech and open assembly, but government has the God-given responsibility to hold you to justice when you step over the line of law and order. I support law enforcement, the Pledge of Allegiance, our flag, and our national anthem. We welcome all who come here legally and are willing to help the poor, oppressed, and disadvantaged in any country around the world.

Though America is not a perfect nation, the world is a better place because God shed His grace on her. I pledge to pray for her, defend her, and do my part to make this nation a better place and encourage her to maintain her amazing philosophical and spiritual foundation and heritage.

## **God as the Foundation for Good Human Government: 1 Peter 2:15-17**

“15) For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16) Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17) Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.”

I value working verse by verse through books of the Bible. In the process we encounter a wide spectrum of subjects and unpack relevant truth for our day.

Keep in mind, this context deals with how Christians should respond to civil government. Peter says we need to recognize that government has a God-given purpose. It exists to punish evil doers and for the praise of those who do right. (1 Peter 2:13-14)

When government gets this wrong and begins to praise evil doers and punish its loyal citizens, then government itself is about to become the target. Where there is no respect of government, lawlessness begins to abound and love and honor are soon trampled under foot.

Peter comes back in these three verses and says Christians are to focus on doing right and serving God as the highest authority. No matter what happens to government or society, God remains the same. He changes not.

We are not to view ourselves as slaves of men, but rather bondslaves of God. This relationship of serving and pleasing God puts us in a position where we can honor all people without prejudice, love the brotherhood of all Christians because we are family, fear God as the highest authority, and honor the king. (1 Peter 2:15-17)

But the question becomes, what happens when government becomes bad or evil? I will give my humble opinion. Peter and the other New Testament writers were inspired to pen this doctrine while living under the shadow of the evil Roman Empire. This approach empowered them to be used by God to reach and change Rome and the course of human history.

But then you ask; "What about the Revolutionary War and the history of the United States?" Didn't our founding fathers violate these principles when they rebelled against England? Those are valid and perplexing questions.

I would point to the Mayflower Compact and ask if it didn't lay down self-governance prior to English Colonialism and establish the goal of religious freedom on this continent? At the same time, I would argue that history is not my master. My goal is to be loyal to Jesus and His Word. We are not responsible for what others have done, but we are responsible for what we do.

Let's face it, fallen human nature has left its ugly footprint on every chapter of history including church history. Yet righteous and godly men and women have done right and led the way to love, healing, dignity, respect, equality, honor, freedom, and liberty and justice for all. I would also argue that only God-fearing men and women can realize these goals and point human society down this path. I believe that was the noble goal of our founding fathers.

When anti-God human nature is on the throne it always results in oppression, exploitation, injustice, lawlessness, and a full spectrum of immoral values and conduct. Every form of government that fallen human nature, apart from the God of the Bible has created, became a prison for the majority of its unsuspecting citizens. This is why we must not lose or rewrite our history, because it is a beacon of light for future generations.

Do not take lightly what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:11-17 or what Paul said in Romans 13:1-14. These are not the mere thoughts of a former fisherman or a washed-out Pharisee. God was speaking through them. They speak directly to the tension of our days.

*(The Declaration of Independence clearly shows that the founding fathers wrestled with the concepts Peter and Terry address here. That's why the majority of the document lists all the offenses the king of Great Britain had committed against God, how the people of the colonies had attempted to work for peaceable and Biblical solutions to these problems, and why they had the right to declare themselves free and independent as they had exhausted all means available to live in peace and harmony under the rule of the king.) -dj*

### **Gaining Favor With God: 1 Peter 2:18-20**

“18) Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. 19) For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 20) For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.”

In these three verses Peter is unpacking one of the greatest principles in the Bible. He is about to explore what it takes to gain favor with God. At first glance it looks like he is talking about submission with respect for an earthly master or supervisor in the work environment. But he is exploring a phenomenon in life that is much deeper.

This reminds me of the story of Joseph. He kept doing his best even when the circumstances were turned against Him. Why? Because he knew that promotions came from God. Over and over again the text says that Joseph found favor. (See Genesis 39:4 and 41) He retained his character, honor, and dignity even though he was mistreated by people time and again.

He knew that promotion comes from God. Joseph's day finally came. He woke up one day and nothing seemed different. He was still in prison but continued to be and do his best. But that night Joseph went to bed as the Prime Minister over the land of Egypt. This whole time God was at work preparing Joseph for that moment and that promotion. He wasn't being put down by his brother, his master's wife or the cupbearer to the king. He was being set up to become ruler over the land of Egypt.

He was building his character by being faithful with every small task entrusted to him. Don't expect big things to come your way if you are not being faithful in the small things. Joseph was walking in favor with God and that is what determined his destiny.

Two times in this text Peter points to the exact same concept of favor that Joseph experienced. When you gain favor with God nothing people do against you can thwart what God is about to do for you. The promotion of God put Joseph over all the people who had mistreated him. Yet

he did not seek vengeance, he continued to be a faithful servant of God. He loved and served the people who did him wrong. Joseph took the high road.

Do you want God's favor in your life? Then become a man or woman of God no matter what your outward circumstances may look like. Adopt the character qualities of honesty, respect, diligence, excellence, and joy. Serve others to the best of your ability even when they do you wrong. God is watching. His favor is worth more than any other value in this life. No person but you can prevent God's destiny for your life. Follow the example of Joseph and do and be your best and trust God to move the mountains in your life.

### **Walking in the Footprints of Jesus: 1 Peter 2:21-23**

"21) For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22) who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23) and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;"

Keep in mind, Peter was writing to the suffering church. Many had lost everything for the sake of Christ and the gospel. In the previous few verses he was talking about gaining favor with God when suffering unjustly. There is no greater example of this than Jesus Himself.

In the rest of this chapter, Peter uses Jesus as an example of suffering. In both 1 Peter 2:22 and 24 Peter quotes from Isaiah 53. This is the prophetic text that foretells the work of Christ on the cross. This chapter is often labeled "The Suffering Servant." Let me make a few applications from what Peter is saying.

First, everyone will undergo some suffering in this life. No one is exempt. It may come in the form of physical illness, misunderstandings, malicious treatment from others, inequities at work, prejudice, betrayal by a friend or being the victim of an accident. Many times our suffering is self-inflicted. The suffering may be spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, or financial. There are no guarantees against suffering in this life. Jesus indicated that storms will come for everyone. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Second, the way you approach your trials and suffering makes a huge difference. You can choose to be positive or negative. You can be happy or miserable. You determine if you are going to be a builder or destroyer. You can bring blessings or curses on yourself and others. You can edify yourself and others or you can make them miserable. You can use your struggles for great good or terrible harm. Your attitude will shape your outcome. Peter pointed out that the way Jesus suffered made Him an example for navigating struggles in this life.

Third, you can use your trials and suffering to deepen your walk with God or you can use them to make excuses to run from God. Notice that Jesus "kept entrusting Himself to the One Who judges righteously." Jesus understood that His mission was greater and His Father's love was

deeper than the pain of the crucifixion. His suffering was not in vain. It served an eternal purpose and God's sovereignty was greater than man's cruelty.

A huge turning point came in my life when I decided to stop making excuses for my failures or blaming others for my plight. That mindset is a trap and a prison. Only those who assume responsibility for their actions, attitudes, and mindset can rise above their circumstances and become truly successful and gain favor with God in this life. (Genesis 39:2)

Finally, when you choose to follow the steps of Christ in dealing with your struggles in this life, then you position yourself to receive God's favor, blessings, and exaltation. According to Philippians 2:5-11, the suffering of Christ was dim compared to the eternal exaltation that followed. Paul was indicating that adopting the mindset of Christ through suffering places us in a position to share in His exaltation.

I confess, I cannot wrap my mind around the implications of what Paul was implying in this text, but something beyond comprehension awaits those who suffer graciously in this life for the glory of God. Yet, I must point out that both the books of Philippians and 1 Peter indicate that the blessings and favor of God start in this life.

The abundant life starts here and now for the child of God. Eternity is going to be glorious, but this life can be wonderful for those with the right attitudes who walk in God's favor despite their external struggles. Make it your goal to walk in the footprints of Jesus as you navigate this life!

### **Our Shepherd and Guardian: 1 Peter 2:24-25**

"24) and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25) For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls."

In these two verses, Peter is quoting from Isaiah 53:4-6. He made it clear that on the cross Jesus not only paid for our sins, He also did everything so that those who believe in Him could be made whole or be healed. I believe this has three applications:

First, Jesus made it possible for us to "die to sin and live to righteousness." This is spiritual healing. Because of His death on the cross, sin is no longer our master. The bondage can be broken. The captive can be set free. The influence, power, and control of Satan on our life can be broken, because Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:7-10)

The truth is that Jesus Christ did everything on the cross to set us free from sin. That includes addictions, iniquities of our forefathers, and our own sinful and rebellious ways. The work of Jesus Christ on the cross is the basis of us becoming new people. (2 Corinthians 5:17) The excuses are gone and the wandering is a thing of the past. You can be free. You can have "zoe life."

Second, the work of Jesus Christ on the cross broke the curse of the fall that brought sin, disease and suffering into the world. This applies to physical healing. The physical healing of God is based on the work of Jesus on the cross. The idea is that sickness and death are no longer master over us. Some will experience degrees of healing in this life, but all will be totally healed in eternity. There is no sickness, disease, suffering, aging, aches, pains, or tears in the presence of God. We will have new, whole, and glorified bodies.

Third, the work of Jesus on the cross bridged the separation between us and God. We are no longer straying like sheep. Those who come to Jesus Christ have returned to “the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.”

The idea of a shepherd is anchored in both Psalm 23 and John 10. Jesus assumes a new role for those who come to Him. He begins to “shepherd them.” In this role, Jesus is the provider for our soul. He provides for us on every level. He wants to provide for us spiritually, physically, emotionally, relationally, and financially. Trust Jesus to shepherd you daily in every area. He is the soul shepherd.

The idea of guardian is a watcher or overseer. In this role, Jesus is the protector of our soul. He does not lose any sheep the Father gives Him. (See John 10:27-30) He is like David who protected his fathers sheep from the lion and the bear. (See 1 Samuel 17:34-37) It is no wonder that David also fought against Goliath and won. He was the new and anointed shepherd and guardian of Israel.

Recognize that Jesus wants to provide for you and fight for you. When you come to Him in simple saving faith, He assumes responsibility for your soul. Notice this relates to the soul. That is the eternal part of you. Remember, Peter is writing to the persecuted church. God will allow outward trials and suffering for the purpose of building our soul. Stop running from Him and start running *to* Him!

### **Reaching an Unsaved Husband. 1 Peter 3:1-6**

“1) In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2) as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

Peter now uses Jesus as an example for marriage. Notice that verse one starts with the phrase, “In the same way, you wives....” Peter is pointing back to the way Jesus endured the cross to purchase our salvation in the previous five verses.

He is saying that respectful submission will pave the way to influence a husband who may be disobedient to God and His Word. Godly character and conduct always has an impact because

it invites God to work in the situation and the relationship. A genuine relationship with God leaves room for God to work without us becoming controlling, threatening, or manipulative.

From the context of culture of the day, it seems that these were most likely arranged marriages and the husband was either not a believer or may have been straying from the Lord. Peter was saying the way to reach him is not to preach at him, but rather to live out a godly and Spirit-filled life in the marriage.

Notice in verses 3-4 that the focus should be on adorning the inner self and not mere outer appearance. Peter is not minimizing the importance of outward beauty, he is simply saying the true beauty comes from the inside. I have seen some very beautiful women and handsome men who had vicious and ugly personalities. They were repulsive. If that's you, I would encourage you to listen carefully to the advice of Peter.

It has amazed me over the years how often a man will leave an outwardly beautiful wife for a not so attractive woman. It didn't take long after meeting the abandoned spouse to discover the root problem. They were angry, bitter, overbearing, mouthy, demanding, and disrespectful. I felt like going down the bar to meet the straying husband and telling the bartender to pour one for me as well.

Ok, I think you get the idea. Beauty alone does not make for a good relationship. I often use these verses when encouraging a Christian wife how to influence and reach her unsaved husband. Though there are no guarantees, I have watched many times how God has used a loving and virtuous wife to reach an unsaved husband. Agape love is powerful and leaves room for God to work.

### **The High Value of a Wife: 1 Peter 3:7**

"7) You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."

Peter now addresses the husband. He starts this admonition with the same words as to the wife; "in the same way." Again, he is referring back to the work of Christ to purchase our salvation. Jesus counted us as more valuable than His own life.

In fact, the word "honor" in this verse has in it the idea of attributing value to something. Peter made it clear in Chapter One that by dying for us, Jesus considered us more valuable than silver or gold. He shed His own blood for us. In the same way, husbands should count the high value of their wife. They should literally "sacrifice for them."

Years ago I was watching a Gary Smalley video as he was speaking to a group of married couples. Toward the beginning he passed around a beat up old violin he bought at a garage

sale. The people passed it around like it was a piece of junk. Then he took it and pointed out the name “Stradivarius” and the serial number inside. He noted that even in its present condition it was worth over \$100,000. The group gasped. He then passed it around again. This time they handled it with reverence and care. He then noted it was the same violin, but they treated it totally differently. The only difference was the value attributed to the violin.

He went on to use that as an illustration of this verse. Husbands should honor their wives because they know her true value. She may be a weaker vessel but is in no way less valuable. In fact, in many ways a woman is more complex and complicated. That’s why Peter tells us to dwell with our wives according to knowledge or in an understanding way. Husbands are called to literally study our wife and get to know her very unique makeup and use that to make our marriage happy and harmonious.

Peter goes on to say that a man’s prayer life will be hindered if his marriage is a mess. In other words, the condition of your marriage affects your relationship with God. Why? Because God loves her no less than he loves you. She is a fellow heir of the grace of life. She is valuable. She is a gift to you from God.

I personally believe when everything the New Testament says about marriage is taken together, God holds the husband much more accountable for the condition of the marriage. If the husband loves his wife, treats her with value, and speaks encouraging words to her, then she will flourish and respond accordingly. If he neglects her, uses her for selfish desires and treats her harshly, she will become exasperated.

Husbands, if you want your walk with God to flourish then invest in your marriage and your family. Many biblical blessings on a man are directly connected to his marriage and family. It is time to make your wife a priority.

### **Be the Light in a Dark World. 1 Peter 3:8-9**

“8) To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9) not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.”

These verses could be looked at several different ways. The bottom line is that Christians should not be the source of turmoil, strife, conflict, division, or destruction in any relationship. Rather we should be peacemakers and healers. We should build up and not tear down. We should be positive and not negative. We should edify and not embroil. We should bless and not curse.

If Christians were to conduct themselves according to the Sermon on the Mount and the fruit of the Spirit, they would become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They would shine in every relationship and become the source of encouragement in the workplace and the marketplace. They would be sought after and not shunned.



There is no getting around the positive influence that Christians should be in the world. Unfortunately, that is often not the case. Many times Christians are mean, grumpy, nit-picky, and critical. They can be a pain in the butt, vengeful, distasteful, and disgraceful to the cause of Christ. They fight, quarrel, and are condescending.

If that is you, stop it! Stop giving Christianity a black eye and causing the world to despise Christians. Get on your knees, repent, and ask the Holy Spirit to baptize you with agape love and make you a servant for the cause of Christ.

God called us for the purpose of being a blessing and inheriting a blessing. Our attitudes, actions, and countenance should make us world changers for good and for the glory of God! Bring Jesus to your sphere of influence. Be the light in an otherwise dark world. Bring love, hope, and encouragement. Put a smile on your face, a song in your heart, and become a source of joy. Be a blessing!

### **Inheriting a Blessing: 1 Peter 3:9-12**

“9) ... for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit the blessing. 10) For, “The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. 11) He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. 12) For the eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and his ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.””

In these verses Peter is quoting from Psalm 34:12-16. He is supporting his point in verses 8-9 that there are tangible blessings for seeking God and honoring Him in all of our dealings with people. He is making a profound point. He is saying that those who live openly for God and treat others with love and respect out of a reverence for Him, will see God show up in that relationship with blessings. God has always worked through His people to bear witness of Himself to others.

I find it refreshing that Peter supports his case by quoting the Old Testament. He is anchoring this truth in the unchanging character of God. He is saying that God has always worked through His people to manifest the knowledge of Himself in the world. God wants to work in and through our lives in such a way as to prove to the unbelieving world that He is and that He blesses those who seek Him.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible in this regard is Hebrews 11:6; “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” How does the non-Christian world come to believe that God exists? It should be by observing God at work in and through the lives of His people. The balance of Hebrews 11 is a panoramic view of God at work in and through the hall of fame of Old Testament saints.

Let me say it this way, God wants to work in your life in such a way as to prove to the people around you that He exists and that He can and does bless His people. Of course, the prerequisite is that you are openly living for God, building your life on biblical principles, walking in the Spirit and being a verbal witness of the Gospel.

When those things line up, God delights to show up in supernatural ways to prove to the unbelieving world around us that He is and that He blesses His people. This principle is so profound it is hard for many Christians to embrace. We are called to be living proof to the world that God exists and that He shepherds His own. This is what it means to “inherit the blessing” at the end of verse nine.

God is very creative in the way He does this in and through the lives of His people. Every story is unique and special. He often shows up in the storms of life. Sometimes He gives divine protection. Other times He gives divine provisions. In some cases it might come in the form of a divine healing that baffles the doctors. Often it comes as specific answers to prayer. Other times it is with supernatural timing or divine connections with people. The list goes on and on.

Here is the key: This is a daily occurrence and not a once in a lifetime event. Those who walk with God in simple faith are given spiritual glasses and see Him at work everywhere. They also become His hands and feet in the world that He works through to accomplish His will. This is an amazing part of inheriting the blessing. We become part of His blessing to others. We inherit the blessing of becoming living proof that God exists to the unbelieving world.

### **Be Zealous About Doing Good: 1 Peter 3:13-14**

“13) Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14) But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled.

We are going to take a small bite this time. We are going to focus on a subject seldom talked about but very significant in the Bible. I am going to focus on the importance of doing good in this world.

Peter had this positive approach to life. He knew that doing good positioned a person to walk in God’s blessing and that most people would view it as positive as well. Few people are so bad that they would attack someone for doing good.

But let’s be honest. There *are* a few jerks in this world. Don’t let them govern your life or color your lens. Don’t live in fear because evil exists in the world. If anyone had reason to be negative it would have been Peter and the early church. They were the victims of great persecution, but they still purposed to do good and take the high road.

The Bible makes it clear in many places including earlier in this context that we don't fight evil with evil. Rather we overcome evil by doing good. If you think there is not enough good in the world, then purpose to tilt the scale through your contributions in life.

We are not responsible for what others do, but we can live on the side of good. We can love instead of hate, we can bless instead of curse, we can give instead of take and we can help instead of hurt.

Chose to live in this world on God's team. Purpose to live by faith and do good to everyone you meet. Be zealous about doing good. Go the extra mile in doing good. Never ever be shy or timid about good works. Ephesians 2:10 says Jesus saves us for the purpose of doing good works in this world.

Think about it, if every Christian adopted this approach to life the world would be a better place. Why? Because there are enough of us to make a huge difference. The Bible teaches we can overcome evil with good. Good is more powerful than evil just as light is more powerful than darkness. There are few things the Bible says we should be zealous about, doing good is one of them.

*(Ephesians 2:10 is one of my favorite verses. The NLT renders it: "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." Other translations use the word "workmanship" where the NLT uses "masterpiece." Paul used the Greek word, "ποίημα" (poiēma) which is the word from which we get the English word, "poem." And, when Paul writes that God planned us to do good works "long ago" I read that to mean that each and every one of us were meant to be a beautiful poem crafted by God for His glory from the very beginning of time.) -dj*

### **Be Spontaneous With The Gospel. 1 Peter 3:15-17**

"15) but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16) and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. 17) For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong."

Peter points out that your best efforts to live for Christ, do good, and have a clear conscience may backfire at times. There are some people who are hard-hearted, deceived, or wrongly biased. The good news is that God can soften their hearts through prayer, your consistent interaction with them based on agape love, and the way you treat them that should be a stark contrast to the world. God wants you to live in such a way that you have a clear conscience as you seek to be salt and light in the world.

So here is the deal as you go through life: God can and does open doors for you to share about your faith in Christ. You should live in such a way as you manifest the fruit of the Spirit that makes people wonder, “What makes this person so different?”, “Why are they always happy?”, “How can they endure hard times with such peace and joy?”, “What do they have that I’m missing?”, “Why is God so real to them?” Be ready to give an answer!

Many times these questions come when we are going through the storms of life with a different attitude than the world. Peter’s point is that we should reflect the character of Christ no matter what our outward circumstances may be. We should live as if God exists and that we know He is in control of our circumstances. When that happens, it spontaneously leads to open doors to share our faith.

So what do we need to be ready to share? Let me give a short list. First, be ready to share your testimony of how you came to faith in Christ. Just tell your story.

Second, briefly share the gospel with them. The gospel includes the fact that we as people are all sinful and lost and deserve God’s judgment. But God loves us so much He sent His only Son to die on cross and pay for our sins. This opened the door for a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Third, share how God is working in your life and how walking with Jesus Christ has changed you. Maybe include a few answers to prayer or how God helped you through some struggles.

Fourth, ask them about their understanding of God and listen while you very naturally dialogue with them. Make it your goal to connect with them and not convert them. The Holy Spirit does the converting, you and I do the conversing.

Finally, invite them to talk more about these life issues and offer to get them a Bible or have a Bible study with them. You don’t need to be a scholar to share about Jesus. If they ask a question you cannot answer, just tell them you will get back to them. Sharing your faith should be as natural and normal as talking about the weather.

### **Suffering for Doing Right: 1 Peter 3:17**

“17) For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”

It is often called “Suffering for Righteousness Sake.” It can happen for many different reasons. Sometimes the root cause can be a sincere misunderstanding. Other times it can be motivated by anger, jealousy, or prejudice. Still other times it can be persecution fueled by hatred of Christians by either the secular world or intolerant religions. There seems to be plenty of suffering in every generation of church history. It is foolish to think that we are exempt.

Did you notice that verse 17 says; “if God should will it so...”? There are times that God “wills” His people to endure suffering. That might stretch your theology! Job, Joseph, David, Daniel, and many New Testament Christians suffered for no apparent reason. Some were even killed for their faith. There is always a cost to spreading the Gospel. But their suffering was not in vain. God used it to strengthen them and accomplish a greater purpose. God never wastes the suffering of His people.

Job became an object lesson to Satan and to his critical friends who came to comfort him. Joseph wasn’t sold out by his brothers, he was set up to be second in command in Egypt and to save his people and many others from famine. David learned how to cry out to God by suffering at the hands of King Saul. Daniel won the favor of the King by spending a night in the lion’s den. The early Christians eventually reached Rome with the Gospel by being willing to suffer and yet love their enemies.

By contrast, when you do wrong or break the law and suffer the consequences, it accomplishes nothing. You are getting what you deserve! I have watched people grumble and complain that they were being treated wrong, but honestly they brought it on themselves. I have seen people fired from jobs because they were critical, judgmental, or didn’t do their work with quality or in a timely fashion. Then they complained even more that they were suffering. They were not suffering, they were reaping the harvest of slothfulness, disrespect, and insubordination. We do reap what we sow in life.

If you want to serve God and make an impact, do your absolute best and still be prepared to walk through the valley of suffering. Often your suffering will come from people whom you thought were friends. I have learned the hard way to do my best and keep my eyes on Jesus without trying to figure out why people behave as they do. It just happens in this life. Wisdom learns how to forgive, let it go, serve and bless those who do you wrong and then press on. When you give a cup of cold water in love to an enemy in need, it builds amazing bridges for the Gospel.

### **God Won: 1 Peter 3:18-22**

“18) For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19) in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20) who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.”

We now come to a very difficult text. Scholars have wrestled with 1 Peter 3:18-22 for centuries. Keep in mind, Peter is using Jesus and an example of suffering unjustly. The sinless One was crucified to purchase our salvation. He didn’t do anything to deserve that kind of treatment, but God had a purpose. The suffering of Christ was used to purchase our salvation.

But notice that though Jesus was put to death in the flesh, He was made alive in the spirit. The soul and spirit do not die. They are eternal. It was in this state that Jesus went and made a proclamation to the spirits now in prison. Peter qualifies this statement by referring to the world that perished during the flood of Noah's day.

I am not going to dive deeply into this subject in this post except to say that the New Testament speaks of Noah and the flood in very factual and literal terms. If you take a broad look at the world that perished, God intervened because the human race was being corrupted. This brings in the mystery of Genesis 6, fallen angels, and the Nephilim. 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 1:6 also touch on this mystery.

Let me simply say that the Bible presents a very different view of history than the modern evolutionists. According to the Bible, something very diabolical happened to the human race in the past that was so severe that God stepped up and destroyed that entire world population with a universal flood. The corruption had to do with the interaction between fallen angels and the daughters of men.

This unique group of fallen angels are being kept in prison awaiting a very severe judgement. (Jude 1:6) They may have been trying to prevent God's promise of salvation by preventing the Messiah from being born. Some speculate that they did this by trying to pollute the DNA of the whole human race.

So what kind of proclamation did Jesus make to them? What was Jesus doing between his death and resurrection? (Ephesians 4:9-10) I believe He was simply proclaiming to Satan and his minions that they had failed. His work on the cross accomplished human redemption. He took the keys of death away from the devil. What Satan meant for evil, God used for good.

This is an amazing text of Scripture. And Peter is using it to illustrate the point that what Satan means for evil in our lives God can and does turn to good. This is the promise of Romans 8:26-39. God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The proclamation was simply that God won! The promise of human redemption was complete and finished. Sinful people can now be saved and reconciled to God. The doors of heaven are open!

### **Jesus is My Ark: 1 Peter 3:18-22**

"18) For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; 19) in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, 20) who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which

a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. 21) And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22) who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

Peter makes a confusing statement in verse 21. He says, “And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you...” Some have erroneously used this phrase to conclude that salvation comes from being water baptized. That is clearly not the case or Paul would have never said in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that Christ did not send him to baptize, but to preach the gospel so as not to confuse the doctrine of salvation. Let’s see if we can dissect this text and harmonize the Bible on this subject.

First, notice that Peter was drawing a comparison with Noah, the flood, and the ark with being saved by being baptized into Christ. When Noah and his family entered the ark they were brought safely through the judgement of the flood. The ark went through the judgment for them, but they were safe because they were “in the ark.”

In Romans 6:3-11 Paul says something very similar. At the moment of salvation through faith in Christ, the new believer is baptized by the Spirit of God “into Christ.” He became like the ark. He bore the judgment of sin on our behalf, but we are brought safely through because we are “in Christ.” Paul says that believers are placed in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. On the cross He became our ark.

We now have a beautiful picture developing in the New Testament. Just like God told Noah to prepare an ark for the judgment of the flood, so God prepared His own Son for the judgment of the cross. But who was saved in the days of Noah? According to Hebrews 11:7, it was only those who had the faith to enter the ark. Noah preached and offered a way of salvation for people to repent and enter the ark, but only Noah and his family believed and were saved. Only eight people went through the judgment of the flood in the ark.

So let’s take another big step in our thinking that clarifies this text. Who went through the judgement of the flood? The answer is everyone including Noah and his family, but they were safe because the ark endured the judgement of the flood for them. By faith they entered the ark.

“And corresponding to that”... , every human will face the judgment of God’s wrath on sin because we have all sinned. However, the believer goes through that judgement “in Christ.” He is our “ark” to bring us safely through. By faith every believer is metaphysically placed “in Christ” on the cross, in the grave and in His resurrection. Believers will not face God’s future wrath because by faith we stand before Him baptized “into Christ.”

The illustration Peter is laying out in this text is one of my favorite explanations of salvation in the New Testament. At age sixteen when I heard the Gospel and God’s plan of salvation through faith in Christ, I repented of my sin and put faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

At that moment in the spiritual realm, the Holy Spirit baptized me into Christ. He placed me “in Christ.”

Notice in Genesis 7:16 it specifically says that God closed the door of the ark behind them. He sealed it. In the same way the New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit is given as our “seal of our salvation.” (See Ephesians 1:13-14) He baptizes us into the body of Christ and seals us safely in the ark of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:13) This whole transaction is based on faith in the simple message of the gospel.

For those who are perishing, the message of the cross and the gospel are foolishness. (1 Corinthians 1:18) The same was true for all the people who watched Noah build the ark and listened to him preach of the pending judgement of the flood. They had never seen rain. They had a false religion that cleared their conscience and even offered fleshly indulgence without accountability.

It took around 100 years to build the ark. God was very patient. During that entire time Noah was presenting God’s plan of salvation from the coming flood. The ark was big. It stood out. Everyone noticed it. The story of crazy Noah warning of the coming flood was widely circulated. Only Noah and his family believed and were saved.

I beg you not to ignore Christ or the gospel. You can only enter by faith. Don’t be caught outside when the doors are closed. God will close the door and the judgement will come. You are only one heartbeat away from the door closing for all eternity for you. Are you outside or inside? Have you entered the ark of Christ by faith or are you mocking and laughing at the crazy Christians? I know where I stand. There is room at the cross for you. Why not put your faith in Christ right now?

### **Resurrection Life Means a New Start: 1 Peter 3:21-22**

“21) and corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22) who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

According to Paul in Romans 6:1-14, we were baptized into three aspects of Christ. We were united in His death, in His burial, and in His resurrection. Each has significance. Our sin was dealt with in His death and burial. Our new life and daily living power comes from being united with Christ in His resurrection.

In this text, Peter focuses on the resurrection. The resurrection and ascension had a profound impact on Peter. It sealed the deal of the identity of Jesus Christ as the Messiah and being the



Son of God. It also meant He was alive and at the right hand of the Father. The right hand of the Father is the place of intercession. He is there on our behalf.

But it also meant that Jesus Christ is now the highest authority next to the Father. All angels and authorities and powers are subjected to Him. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is above all. But hang on, there is more.

The implication of being baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ, means that we are also seated with Christ in heavenly places. We rule with Him. (See Ephesians 2:4-7) We are no longer under Satan's domain, influence, or control. We are no longer his doormat. We have both heavenly position in Christ and we have heavenly authority in Christ.

The full implication of the death and resurrection of Christ are developed in Ephesians 1-3 and Romans 6-8 respectively. Peter was merely cracking the subject open for us in 1 Peter 3:21-22. His focus is on the resurrected Christ.

The full meaning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is hinted at in these verses. The believer is fully immersed in all aspects of being "in" Christ. The old is gone and the new comes. The believer has resurrection life available. Old things pass away and everything becomes new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Let's return to the illustration of Noah and the ark in the previous few verses. (1 Peter 3:18-20) Don't miss this: Jesus is not only our shelter through the storm and the judgment, He is also our open door into a totally new life.

When the ark rested on Mount Ararat, the doors were opened to a totally new world. The old was washed away by the flood. It was time to start over again. They stepped out of the ark into a new life. They had a fresh start. They were ready to plant, cultivate, and repopulate. Just as Noah and his family had a new start, so does every born again Christian. Salvation gives us the opportunity to plant and cultivate a new life. It washes away the old and ushers in the new.

### **Count the Cost of Following Jesus: 1 Peter 4:1-4**

"1) Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2) so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."

Count the cost of following Jesus before temptations or trials come your way. Make Jesus Lord of your life and purpose to obey and follow Him no matter the cost.

Jesus accepted His mission with the cross in mind. He purposed to die rather than give way to sin. He was sinless. One sin would have disqualified Him from being our substitute payment.

There was something about His resolve to suffer rather than sin that took the sting out of the cross. I believe that is the point at which grace takes over and God's strength abounds.

These verses are saying something profound. Peter was applying the same principle to himself and all of God's people. He was saying to count the cost before committing to follow Jesus.

A brief survey of the life of Peter illustrates the significance of this principle. During the trial of Jesus, Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus. Why? Simply because he feared the possibility of suffering. After the resurrection, Jesus spent time with Peter on this issue. He talked about love and explained that a cross was waiting for Peter if he chose Jesus. He then invited Peter to follow Him. (See John 21:15-23)

Peter had a decision to make. Would he live for self or lay down his life for Christ and the Gospel? Being double-minded on this issue causes huge inner conflict and turmoil right in the middle of the storm.

Something happened inside of Peter when he proposed to follow Jesus even if it led him to a cross. He was filled with a new conviction, boldness, and courage. Years later Peter accepted death rather than compromise. He was crucified upside down. Rome could not threaten him, intimidate him, force him, or cause him to budge because he had settled the issue years earlier. He chose to follow Jesus no matter the personal cost.

Paul explained this same principle is what gave him unshakable courage to live for Christ and preach the gospel in the face of threats and persecution. Listen to what he said in Acts 20:24; "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God." He went on to say that he knew that suffering awaited him, but he had already resolved what path to walk for the glory of God.

The bottom line is that we cannot serve Jesus out of convenience or for personal gain, because at some point the cost will be greater than what we are willing to pay. Those who wait until they are in the middle of the storm to decide to follow Jesus usually pull anchor and give way to sin and temptation. Temptation is most severe to those who have no defined convictions. If following Jesus is a preference it is easy for Satan to make sin look more appealing.

Do what Jesus, Peter, and Paul did: Count the cost before the storm clouds gather. Make Jesus Lord of your life and set your rudder before the headwinds of life come your way. Dial in your moral compass before Satan tries to entice you into sin. Don't let circumstances or the hormones of the moment be your guide. That was the root problem that caused Peter to deny three times that he even knew Jesus. He needed to settle some issues before answering the call to follow Jesus. Lordship is not born out of convenience of the moment.

Deciding these issues in advance is the best way to live for the will of God rather than the lusts of man. The word “purpose” in verse 1 literally means “to make up your mind to do this.” This will arm you for the coming battle.

### **Stop Wasting Your Life: 1 Peter 4:2-5**

“2) so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3) For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.”

Peter was very blunt. Let me give a personal paraphrase of these two verses. “2) Don’t waste another minute of your present or future serving the world, the flesh, or the devil. Devote the rest of your life here on earth to serving God and doing His will. 3) You have already wasted enough of your life in the past serving the ungodly desires of the world. Now set a new path for your life. Leave the sexual immorality, lusts, drunkenness, running around, party scene, and the worship of materialism and idols behind you. Stop drinking from the sewer of sin. These things add up to a wasted life.”

God wants us to make the most of the rest of our life for His glory, but we have to do our part. He will make up for lost time. He can restore gifts, talents, and opportunities. He can set you free from addictions to alcohol, drugs, immorality, and corruption. He can forgive your past of sin and give you a new direction in life.

But you need to repent from your old life and close that door forever. Work on renewing your mind and putting on your new identity in Christ. (Ephesians 4:17-24)

Forgive and forget the failure of your past and press on to a new calling in life. Don’t waste another minute beating yourself up over the sins or mistakes of your past. Move on! It’s a new day! (Philippians 3:12-16)

Don’t let your old friends drag you back into the sewer of sin. Share the gospel with them, invite them to follow Jesus, but move on and let God fill your life with new friends who are sold out for Jesus. (1 Peter 4:4-5)

Get to know Jesus in all of His fullness and glory. Seek Him as your Savior, healer, provider, sustainer, Master, and sovereign Lord. Purpose to live for Him and serve Him with the rest of your life. Dedicate every minute that’s left to Him! (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Ask God to fill you with the power of His Holy Spirit and anoint you for whatever calling He has for your life. Trust Him to open new doors, move mountains, and give you power and grace in the moment of need. Walk in the Spirit and share the fruit of the Spirit through your actions and attitudes. (Luke 11:13, Galatians 5:16-24, Ephesians 5:18)

Finally, shut off your television, turn off the depressing news, stop filling your mind and soul with Hollywood smut or internet garbage. Instead, seek God and get to know Him. Learn how to commune with God, pray, worship, and abide in His presence. Instead of wasting two hours on a movie or watching a sports event, spend two hours in God's presence. Times of refreshing come from being in the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:19-21, Ephesians 3:14-21)

When people ask me how the year has been for me so far, I say "It's been the best months of my life." Way before the coronavirus came, I dedicated 2020 to a deep and passionate pursuit of God. I have spent hours reading, listening to His Word in audio form, and absorbing hundreds of life-impacting messages and sermons from godly men and women. My cup is not empty, my cup is full! Times of refreshing come from being in the presence of the Lord.

If you are depressed, discouraged, and walking around in misery, you would be far better off to start drinking from a different fountain! Start feeding at a different table and start serving a different Master. Jesus is still King of kings and Lord of lords! Make the rest of your life the best of your life!

#### **Don't Let Your Old Friends or Past Life Stop Your Growth and Progress: 1 Peter 4:4-6**

"4) Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you."

Your friends can be your enemies. If they have the wrong morals and values they can drag you down with them. The world wants to wrap the blanket of sin, shame, and debauchery around you until you choke and suffocate.

In John 10:10 Jesus said, "10) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." Jesus is the good shepherd. He has your best interests in mind. He wants you to rule and reign with Him. Satan and the world wants to steal and exploit you. The world, the flesh, and the devil are not committed to your happiness, growth, or progress. They want to ruin you.

When someone becomes a Christian, Satan does not let go easily. Your old friends and your old sins and addictions will seek to drag you back into your former lifestyle. If you say "no" and side with God, they will turn on you and ridicule, mock, and malign you. Be prepared to be called names, cursed, and verbally attacked.

We are now living in times very similar to the days of Noah as talked about in 1 Peter 3:13-22. Anything is acceptable in modern society except living for God and standing on biblical morals and values. In the context, Peter is building on the story of Noah and his family. He is saying that every Christian will endure similar treatment from the world. I can only imagine the ridicule,

mocking, and scorn they endured as they stood for righteousness and built the ark. It was most likely loud, shameless, and intimidating.

The pressure will be great and temptations will be many to pull anchor and drift back into the world. But as Peter warns in the next two verses, a judgment is coming. Don't waste your life or throw away your potential. Be like Noah and his family and keep building your ark. Make your relationship with Jesus Christ your top priority.

### **The End Times and Radical Christian Community: 1 Peter 4:7-11**

"7) The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 8) Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9) Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10) As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 11) "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

I love what Peter does in these verses. He moves from things to avoid to things to pursue. Many are grumbling and complaining these days. I constantly hear things like; "Things are getting so difficult, how can we live out our faith these days?" Keep in mind, the book of 1 Peter and the entire New Testament were written to the persecuted church. God gave this instruction for "times like these."

In light of hard times, Peter said the believers needed to focus on five things. First, they needed to be of sound judgment for the purpose of prayer. God wants His people to face the struggles of this life through prayer. Prayer connects us to God. This verse could be a sermon all by itself. Sufficient to say God calls His church to prayer.

Second, he says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another." The word fervent means "to be stretched out." Agape love stretches us. It covers a multitude of sin, because it overlooks the faults and weaknesses in others to accept and love them. Being a channel of agape love will stretch you, especially in difficult times when it is tempting to be selfish and self-centered.

Third, Peter points to the need to be hospitable without complaint. Many Christians were losing their jobs, homes, and livelihood through persecution. They had become outcasts. The early church put love in action by opening their homes to those in need. The flip side was they expected everyone to be diligent, work, and contribute to the community of faith. There were no freeloaders.

Fourth, Peter said to employ your spiritual gifts in serving one another. This is specifically talking about the “grace gifts.” This is anchored in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12-14. Peter was calling the body of Christ to come alive and serve one another through grace gifts in Christian community.

I personally believe that as the end times come upon us there will be a need to return to Acts 2:41-47. The church age will end exactly as it started with the Christians in close community with one another. We will need to become radical in our commitment to love and serve one another. As the church steps up to this calling, God will again pour out His miraculous power and provisions just like He did for the early church.

Finally, Peter ends this paragraph in verse 11 with an admonition to speak uplifting and edifying words to one another and to serve one another with the strength God supplies. This is profound. Peter was saying that both our speech and our actions are important. God calls us to build up and not to tear down. We are called to verbally encourage each other as we get blisters on our hands serving one another.

The end times will have difficult challenges, but it will also be the spark of revival for the church. I believe it will be the fuel that unites and ignites the western church back into Christian community and the extraordinary power and presence of God in and through His people.

#### **Purified Through the Fire: 1 Peter 4:12-14**

“12) Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13) but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”

Do not be surprised when severe trials and hardship happen and come your way in this fallen world. Satan is the god of this world in the present age. (See 2 Corinthians 4:4) He is out to destroy both Israel and those who love Jesus. (Revelation 12:17)

When we suffer for the cause of Christ we actually share in His sufferings. (Philippians 3:10) He does not abandon us. Jesus turns it to our good and strengthens us. There is actually cause for rejoicing in suffering for Christ because when He returns those who suffered for Him will be uniquely blessed.

But there is more than just future glory! Verse 14 says those who are reviled for the name of Christ are blessed in another way: The Spirit of glory and of God rests upon them! This is what happened to early church leaders when they were arrested and threatened (Acts 4), and to Stephen when he was stoned. (Acts 7) The threats and suffering were accompanied by an

outpouring of grace, glory, peace, and courage. The Spirit of God was present in extraordinary ways.

The persecuted church is the anointed and glorious church. It is the church that abides in the shelter of the Almighty. If I had one message for the western church today it would be, “Don’t tremble at the thought of suffering for Jesus. It might be God’s prescription for our weak faith and shallow walk with God.”

### **The Doctrine of Suffering: 1 Peter 4:15-18**

15) If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people’s affairs. 16) But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! 17) For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News? 18) And also, “If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?””

There is a very clear doctrine of suffering in the New Testament. The first kind of suffering happens because we live in a fallen world and bad things happen. Natural disasters, diseases, and accidents randomly happen to people. God’s grace and power are abundantly available in these storms of life.

Second, another kind of suffering happens as a consequence of bad choices we make. This is what Peter was talking about in verse 15. If you kill someone, steal, cheat, or lie there can be severe legal and relational consequences. Peter makes it clear that the value system of a Christian should prevent this kind of suffering. There is no room in the character or conduct of a Christian for this kind of behavior.

However, even here God’s grace often shows up and many become Christians through legal problems or incarceration. I value what I call, “The Incarcerated Church.” There are many who have come to Christ and have been transformed by the power of the gospel while in prison.

But in this context, Peter is talking about a different kind of suffering. He is talking about the persecution, affliction, or ill treatment that comes because of a person’s faith in Christ. The bottom line is that Satan and wicked people target Christians just as evil is alienated to good and hate despises love. This kind of suffering is not only unjust, it is totally irrational– but it is very real.

It happened to the early Christians. Many lost everything including their lives for the sake of Christ and the gospel. In this Epistle, Peter is writing to the persecuted church. It has happened throughout church history, and it is happening in many parts of our world today.

In this text Peter makes two profound observations. First, when you suffer for righteousness sake, the Spirit of God and amazing grace are poured out upon you. Verse 14 says, “the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.” The stories of this kind of amazing glory are abundant. They rival what happened to Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace and what happened to Stephen when he was stoned.

There is no shame when you suffer for being a Christian. Instead Peter says you should rejoice that you were counted worthy to suffer for Jesus. (See Acts 5:41) Peter and the early apostles often found themselves in these situations and they soon connected the dots that God works in extraordinary ways in these situations. What people intend as a “set-back” is often a “set up” for God.

But second, Peter points out that judgement is coming and all people will pass through its fire. If it took the work of Christ on the cross to satisfy the justice of God to save Christians, what will be the outcome of those who stand before God apart from Christ? Peter was horrified by the thought of eternal suffering coming for the wicked and ungodly. This is my understanding of verses 17-18.

Let me summarize the doctrine of suffering by saying God is absolutely sovereign over suffering. He can show up in any situation and turn it around for good. There is no disaster beyond the reach of His power and grace. There is also no human heart so hard or prison cell so dark that His love and light cannot penetrate. And finally, if you are counted worthy to suffer for His sake, rejoice because God is with you in a very special way and extraordinary things are most likely taking place that you cannot see or understand. Embrace Jesus in simple faith and trust Him that eternal results are coming through your trials and suffering.

### **The Capstone of The Doctrine of Suffering: 1 Peter 4:19**

“19) Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.”

This verse is the capstone on the doctrine of suffering. Notice that when a Christian suffers according to the will of God, they should do two things. First, they should entrust their soul to the faithful Creator. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” I believe Peter was referring to this concept. The body may suffer and perish, but the soul and spirit are eternal. Both Jesus and Peter were preparing the believers for martyrdom.

When you entrust your soul to the faithful Creator, you are yielding to God’s sovereignty and appealing to His grace and mercy. You are taking the event away from the enemy and placing yourself in God’s hands.



This was the wrestling match Jesus had in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:36-40) This is what Jesus did just before He died on the cross; "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46) This is what Stephen did as he was being stoned. (Acts 7:59-60)

But secondly, notice you entrust your soul to God as you do what is right. Most often the suffering comes from doing what is right and pleasing to God. In the previous few verses Peter argued the point that there is no merit in suffering for doing what is wrong. We could also argue that there is no merit in avoiding suffering through compromise under the guise of personal safety. That accomplishes nothing for the glory of God.

There are two Bible stories that stand out in illustrating this principle. The classic story is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego not bowing before King Nebuchadnezzar and his huge idol. "16) .... they replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17) If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18) But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.'" (Daniel 3:16-18) They were committed to do right and accept the consequences. The results were monumental in illustrating the importance of taking a stand for truth and righteousness.

The second story is found in Acts 5:27-29. (Read all of chapter 4-5 to get the full impact.) The Apostles were arrested for following the Great Commission and commanded to stop preaching and teaching in the Name of Jesus. Let's drop in on the story for the highlight.

"27) When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28) saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29) But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men."

The significance of this event cannot be overstated. Had they compromised and melted in the face of physical danger, Christianity would have died a slow death. Did you notice Peter took the lead in this stand for doing right? He lived what he taught in his epistles.

I could argue that the principle of suffering for doing right and martyrdom has been both the fuel and the fire behind the spread of Christianity through the centuries. Not one hair will drop from the head of a Christian who stands for God in the face of danger and does what is right without all the hosts of heaven taking notice.

The battle for the Bible, truth, and the Gospel is won or lost with this doctrine. There is a line in the sand that Christians must be willing to suffer and die for in order to defend and advance the gospel. (See Philippians 1:12-30) It has always been this way and it will be this way until Jesus returns.

I beg you to take this doctrine seriously and settle the issue before you are in the crisis. As the end times come upon us like a wave, there will be ample opportunities to take bold stands in faith and love for the sake of the Gospel. If not for such courageous Christians, the obituary for Christianity would be quickly written.

### **Courageous Church Leaders Stepping Up for the Glory of God: 1 Peter 5:1-4**

“1) Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2) shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; 3) nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

We need to connect these verses to the context of the entire book of 1 Peter. Keep in mind, Peter was writing to the persecuted church. The suffering he was referring to was universal against all Christians, very severe, and resulted in martyrdom for many. It was against this backdrop that Peter said the elders and pastors needed to step up their game and shepherd God's people. The church needed to come alive and function in the broken social context of Rome.

The Bible teaches that in the last days very difficult times will come again. (See 2 Timothy 3:1-4:8 as an example.) With this in mind, the text in front of us comes into focus. In the end times the church will once again be essential to care for God's people in crisis. As persecution mounts, the church will be faced with caring for many homeless, helpless, and hurting people.

Just as Peter was exhorting his fellow shepherds to step up and care for God's people and keep the church on task, so it is in many countries today around the world and soon will be in the western church as well.

Being a pastor or elder is not for the weak of heart. It is not a cushy career intended to pad a big bank account and prepare for retirement on the golf course. It is for the courageous who are called to lay down their lives for the flock and often be singled out to take the brunt of the assault against the church.

Peter witnessed Jesus as the Chief Shepherd model laying down His life for the flock. Peter took seriously the charge he received from Jesus to take care of His sheep. (See John 21:15-17) I believe in 1 Peter 5:1-4 Peter is passing on that charge to every pastor and elder. He pointed out that when Jesus returns He will place an unfading crown of glory on every pastor and Christian leader who serves well for the glory of God. (Vs 4)

I had many ask me what was happening with the Covid-19 crisis and the accompanying riots and social unrest. I will resist slipping into a conspiracy theory, but I will emphatically say that

God used those events as basic training for His shepherds and his church to prepare for the latter days.

Now is time for the church to come alive and step to the front lines with agape love and the gospel. Where this is happening, amazing stories emerge of many coming to Christ and government leaders looking to courageous pastors and the church for answers. These are amazing days filled with open doors. It is time for the church to step up and not step back.

### **Enfolding the Flock: 1 Peter 5:5-7**

“5) You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. 6) Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7) casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

In the previous four verses, Peter was admonishing church leaders to be courageous shepherds in caring for God’s people in crisis and to be on the front lines with the gospel in reaching a broken culture. He now shifts his focus to the entire flock. He is encouraging the local church to come alive and start functioning with heavenly values.

It is profound that Peter addresses verse 5 to the younger men. He is encouraging every generation of Christians to harmonize and cooperate together in a very alive and mobilized church community.

There are several analogies for the church in the New Testament. One is a living building. (1 Peter 2:4-10; Ephesians 2:19-22) Another analogy is a living and healthy body. (See 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Romans 12:4-21) In this context Peter is using the analogy of a flock of sheep. (1 Peter 5:1-4) Jesus also used this analogy in John 10:1-30.

In every analogy, the emphasis is on the whole and not just a few parts. Every piece of the building is important. Every organ in the body has an important function. So also, every sheep in the flock is significant to the shepherd. He cares for all of them.

Usually in a flock of sheep or herd of animals of any kind, there is a pecking order. The older ones play a dominant role. The younger are more passive and often the juvenile males stray from the herd looking to start their own pack.

Peter was warning against that tendency in the church. He was calling for humility in functioning together and making room for one another. Never ever look down on younger Christians. Instead, embrace the “one another” callings in Scripture. (See all the “one another” callings in Romans 12-15)

In these verses, Peter warns against pride which is basically self-focus, self-glory, self-promotion, and self-accreditation. Pride takes credit for what God and others have accomplished. It causes one to think more highly of self than is appropriate. (Romans 12:3) Peter warns that pride is a wide open door for Satan to enter and reap havoc on the whole flock. The only cure for pride is submission and humility. The proud of heart are an abomination to the Lord. (Proverbs 16:5) Peter says God actively resists the proud. That is a very sobering thought!

Notice that Peter concludes these few verses by warning against anxiety, fear, stress or worry. When you yield yourself to God, recognize that He not only cares for you, but He is also your Chief Shepherd. His mighty hand is more than able to provide, protect, and prepare an abundant table for you in the presence of your enemies. (Psalm 23:5)

I personally believe that as the “latter days” come upon us, fear and anxiety will be our greatest enemy. In these verses Peter was addressing that common tendency. Sheep panic quickly in the face of danger and the frenzy affects the whole flock. Peter was saying, “Stay calm, the Chief Shepherd is on duty.” Cast all of your care upon Him.

### **Getting A Grip: 1 Peter 5:8-9**

8) Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9) But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”

Peter now places the blame for much human suffering at the feet of Satan. He points out that the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He is out to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10)

But Peter does not succumb to fear. Rather he admonishes the Christians to resist the devil firm in their faith. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:7-8), and He seated Christians in heavenly places with Himself and gave them authority over unclean spirits. (Ephesians 1:20-23, Colossians 1:13, Matthew 10:1)

Satan loves to get Christians worked up into a frenzy. It reminds me of a herd of African cape buffalo. When the roaring lion comes on prowl, they can become easy prey if they panic and run. But when they stand their ground, turn and resist, they can kill lions. If they panic and run they become lunch for the lions. When the cape buffalo resist as a group they put the lions to flight. James said, “resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

Unfortunately, Christians are susceptible to panic. I have never seen more fear or anxiety among Christians than during Covid-19. Even the mention of persecution or the end times caused Christians to panic in those days and we’re still easily moved to panic.

Get a grip! Jesus is still on His throne. We still have authority in Christ. God still answers prayer. God has not packed up and gone on vacation. We are still soldiers in God's army and the armor still works. God wants us to take our stand, resist the enemy, and focus on the Great Commission.

Did you notice that little phrase; "The same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren in the world"? Non-Christians go through the same sufferings and trials. They struggle with sickness and disease. They have relational problems and lose their jobs. They have financial struggles. Many have succumbed to addictions and have legal issues. Satan shoots at them as well. Oftentimes their problems are compounded many times beyond what Christians can even imagine. They are searching for answers.

Here is the bottom line: These are days of great opportunity for the gospel. The only reason Jesus is delaying His return is so many more can be saved. (2 Peter 3:8-9) Stop the panic and get back to presenting the gospel. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. It's time to stop the frenzy and get back to the good fight of faith. It is time to pull the defense and send the offense back into the game.

### **Beyond Suffering: 1 Peter 5:10-11**

"10) And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. 11) To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Better things are coming for the believers. The suffering is only for a little while. What is coming far surpasses anything this life has to offer. We look forward to eternal glory. And yet God does not waste our struggles or our suffering in this life. He works in them and through them for our good. His grace surrounds us even in our darkest hour.

The promise is that Christ Himself will use our suffering to bring us to maturity, confirm our love for Him, strengthen our faith, and establish our character. Satan may try his hardest to tear us down, but Jesus will pour out His grace on us in such a way as to build us up. Satan's worst attack can become God's greatest opportunity to work in our lives.

This is the same sentiment Paul had when he wrote to the believers in Philippi who were facing opposition for the gospel. He said, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6) No matter what the enemy may throw at us, God always has the final word and He writes the last chapter.

That's why Peter could say; "To Him be dominion forever and ever." (1 Peter 5:10) God not only inhabits eternity, He rules! His sovereign plans will come to pass. Eternity belongs to Him and His people. He will rule forever and ever.

## **A Powerful Closing: 1 Peter 5:12-14**

“12) Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! 13) She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. 14) Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.”

It is significant that Peter acknowledges Silvanus. He was the faithful traveling companion of Paul and messenger from the Jerusalem Council to help carry the verdict back to the gentile churches across Asia. ( Acts 15:22-35) He was commonly known by the name “Silas.” Notice in Acts 15:32 that both Judas and Silas were prophets and preachers. They had a ministry of exhorting and strengthening the brethren.

In Acts 15:36-41 when Paul and Barnabas set out in separate directions, it was none other than Silas that became the ministry partner of Paul. He is spoken of at length in Acts 15-18. He accompanied Paul on the Macedonian call and shared the public beating and jail cell with him in Philippi. (Acts 16) He also helped plant the churches in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth.

It is worth mentioning that he is called “Silvanus” in 2 Corinthians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1. In these texts he and Timothy were working closely together with Paul and both of them were pictured as actively sharing the preaching ministry with Paul. (See 2 Corinthians 1:19) They were part of the second wave of leaders and faithful workers in the early church.

What becomes very interesting is that Peter mentions Silvanus at the end of his first epistle. He became the “faithful brother” and courier of the epistle Peter wrote and sent to the dispersed believers. It might be inferred that because of his role as courier from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, Silas was as much Peter’s eyes and ears into the happenings within the Gentile Church as he was Paul’s traveling and ministry companion.

Could it be that he became the official messenger and bridge between the Jewish and Gentile church after the Jerusalem council? Did he have an official role to confirm the true gospel and message of the grace of God to the early church? Was he the voice to the early body of Christ entrusted with the authority of the Apostles to say; “This is the true grace of God; Stand firm in it!”? If so, he may have been more widely known and respected in the church at large than the Apostle Paul. He was known not only west into Asia but also east into Babylon.

This brings us to the mystery in the next verse about the identity of “she who is in Babylon.” Was Peter talking about a woman or the church which is the bride of Christ? It is noteworthy that the Arabic, Syriac, and the Latin Vulgate all include the word “church” to clarify the meaning.

The spread of the early church because of persecution was phenomenal. It went in all directions. It went north and south as well as east and west. The Apostle Thomas was martyred in India. The mention of Babylon is significant, because the gospel was bridging the curse left over from the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11) Just as God dispersed all nations after the flood, the gospel was being sent to draw back all nations after the cross. God was drawing people back together through His Church. I would argue that only Jesus Christ and the gospel can bring peace between the nations and heal the strife between various ethnic groups. This leads into the final point in Peter's closing.

The Christian greeting of a holy kiss mentioned in 1 Peter 5:14 is absolutely profound. This gesture "in Christ" united Jew and Gentile. It bridged the gap between Africa, Europe, Asia, Babylon, and India. The zeal of the early church to spread the gospel crossed ethnic barriers, linguistic barriers, political barriers, cultural barriers, and geographical barriers. The gospel seeks to bring back and heal what Satan has worked through the centuries to divide and destroy. The gospel is the only basis of peace on earth and good will among all people.